

As most herders know, the Texas Sheep & Goat Raisers Assn. used Del Rio for their annual convention site. I've been down here a couple of days watching the action. Most of my time has been spent trailing along behind my wife, Goat Whiskers the Younger's wife, and Goat Whiskers himself. Every time I've gotten the pillows properly arranged in the motel room they've been ready to move. It was a waste of money to rent this high priced air conditioned room. We should have leased a brush arbor to use as a resting spot.

Young Goat Whiskers has been in charge of holding the pot and handling both the heavy and light financing of the trip. By putting our money together, a lot of time has been saved struggling for the checks. Also, by using the pooling method, we are assured that we'll leave town on the same day. Your welcome in Mexico or a border town always ends the minute you run out of money. Whiskers is going to rush our stay. Just this morning, I caught him giving our wives \$4 apiece to spend shopping across the river. Throwing away that kind of money guarantees that our visas won't be valid for another 24 hours.

Yesterday we did get to visit the small winery down close to the international bridge. One family has owned the place since the 1880s. The original founder came from Milan, Italy, working his way through Mexico to settle in this valley. Spanish priests had planted the vineyard prior to his arrival. The 15 acres that remain in the vineyard are said to be the last of the wine industry in Texas.

Winery visiting is soothing for a rancher. Vineyards don't cough or develop stiff joints. Vineyards grow in the rich ground and give forth a lushness to the surroundings. Sunlight reflects from their leaves; neither needles or thorns thrive in their presence. Bugs probably give some trouble, but not like what we are used to.

White oak casks imported from Spain are used to age the wine, which does have to be filtered and strained now and then during the three years of aging. However, once you get a batch working, sleeping sickness, mosquitos, or face flies can't blow the deck. Wine makers would know what to do with our problems.

Drouths plague the business, though. The worse one to hit the industry fell when alcoholic beverages became illegal in the U.S.. During prohibition, the owners of this one said, he had to sell non-fermented grapes to folks that had suddenly developed an appetite for fresh fruit. Rangers, he said, checked his outfit every day to see that he wasn't back in operation. I imagine one reason the law came by so often was to be sure that he was constantly aware of all the grief and suffering that prohibition was causing his craft.

Young Whiskers couldn't stand talking straight wine. He just had to tell the vintner that we were herders. That ended the wine interview. The wine man, you see, has a sheep ranch over in Mexico. Before I could ask another question they were talking about buck sales and wool prices.

I had hoped that the subject would stay on wine until the fellow got around to offering us a few glasses. The office had a big refrigerator by the front door. It looks like Whiskers could have saved his sheep talking for one of the Del Rio wool houses. People who run wool houses don't mind how much you talk as long as you don't start salting up the floor with tears. Goat Whisker's trouble is that he has sheep disease of the mind; I'd still bet that the vintner had intended to give us several free samples. It's my luck to fall in with an hombre who can't forget woolies long enough to learn about wine.

The lease on our rooms expires at 1 p.m. Young Whiskers had better cut down on the expenses or we won't be able to negotiate another day's rent. Over the noise of the typewriter, I can hear our wives rustling their shopping bags.

I guess if we ever get to visit the distilleries in Kentucky Goat Whiskers will want to discuss the lamb market. Sheep ranching on a 360 day a year basis ought to be enough for anyone. Whiskers is a big disappointment.